

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION



HENRI VAN ZEYST

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Foreword

Dependent origination (*paticca samuppāda*) is one of the most important aspects of the teaching of the Buddha. Essentially it is an expansion of the four noble truths in which the Buddha outlined his doctrine concerning the meaning the origin, the cessation of sorrow and conflict, together with the path leading to such cessation. It was this original outline which was expanded to cover the three stages of existence, in the past, the present and the future. Such existence, however, is not only the life-span from birth to death, depending on and conditioned by actions in a previous life, and then further projecting itself in a future life, but can be discerned also in the microscopic span of a single thought.

It should not be understood as a strict law of cause and effect, which would lead to an inexorable fixture of every action becoming a reaction and a cause, from which perpetual motion an escape would be impossible. It is rather a controlling influence of conditionality, which can not only condition the arising, the strengthening, the expanding spheres of influence, but which may also counteract such influence and even completely arrest its progress.

It is this teaching of conditionality and relativity which has placed the doctrine of the Buddha above the rigid authority of inspired and revealed religions. It is this moderation and absence of dogmatic views which has given to Buddhism a name and honoured place among the great philosophies of life. Here is shown, not only

the way in of origination, but also the way out of cessation, both being dependent in their process on conditions which are fluid. It is this freely moving process that makes cessation possible without supernatural grace, without divine intervention, without salvation, and yet, with deliverance and emancipation.

Introduction

There has always been, and quite naturally so, considerable speculation as to what caused the Buddha's enlightenment. This kind of interest is mainly aroused by the fact or the manner in which the many founders of religions were affected at the outset of their new mission. It is usually a case of conversion from a worldly life to a spiritual outlook, conditioned by some sort of revelation or vision of the divine, which made an illiterate camel-driver into an inspired prophet, the son of a carpenter into a miracle worker, an unwilling man with a stammer into a leader of his nation out of slavery.

Such conversions have been witnessed by saints as Augustine of Hippo, by sinners as Mary of Magdalen, by intellectuals as Cardinal Newman, by mystics as John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi and Sri Ramakrishna, by reformers as Martin Luther, Calvin and Wesley, by men of vision as Krishnamurti and women of devotion as Mother Theresa, all of whom experienced a true conversion, that is a complete change of heart and mind, which made them renounce their worldly life and turn towards a “goal” of spiritual light, which some called God in many names, or truth, or love.

Such realisation often came in a sudden flash, as when Saul, on the way to Damascus to persecute the new Christian disciples, heard himself called by name, became physically blind, but attained a spiritual light which made him the apostle of Christianity for the gentiles. Not many have been able or have even tried, to put into

words that supreme experience; for, words are no longer an experience, but are at most a vague memory and reflection. But the lasting change of such conversion was truly a change of attitude, a turning to godliness, not necessarily God, a change not of mode, but a complete substitution and revolution, in which the old had fallen away to make room for new insight.

Then, such revelation carries with it the urge to communicate, to share, to impart, to transmit to others what seems a new discovery. And then there is born that zeal and earnestness to render service, so that others too may benefit, the spirit of the missionary, which sometimes in so intense and fanatic that conversions are made at the point of the sword, killing the body so as to save the soul.

Enlightenment

We have seen by now enough of the teaching of the Buddha and of the history of its propagation, to understand that all such zeal has to be excluded from what is usually termed the Buddha's enlightenment. Although in the Vedic teachings, prevailing then as now, there are many personifications of the forces of nature which often are treated as individuals with natural and supernormal powers, there was and there is none who could impart enlightenment or realisation or inspiration or whatever term one would like to give to the experiencing of reality apart from actuality.

The enlightenment of prince Siddhartha which made him into a fully awakened Buddha was then not an inspiration or a revelation; there was no supernatural disclosure by some supreme deity; there was no divine influence under which his later teaching was promulgated. Although prince Siddhartha renounced his worldly life, which may be seen as a kind of conversion, that was not a final one, because that life of asceticism did not lead him to a goal of intended truth, but only served the purpose of showing that neither the extreme of self-indulgence, nor that of self-mortification can lead to self-knowledge. Then, what was that enlightenment? What did he realise? It seems so very important to know that; for, it is not by merely following a teacher or accepting his authority, that there can be an individual experiencing which would be the discovery of

the truth for oneself, which would be a true conversion from faith to understanding.

Faith is so easy as it is proved by the many thousands and millions of faithful who are ready to submit their reason and intellect as a supreme sacrifice of devotion. Faith is the easy way out in a surrender of will, when one can admit and submit to whatever one wants; and when one does not want that any more, one just changes one's faith, one's guru, one's god, for one who is more suitable to the needs of the moment. In faith one seeks the satisfaction of one's own concept, one seeks the external confirmation of one's own internal opinions and doubts, one seeks oneself in the guise of the authority of another till that one ceases to satisfy, when one may change the colour and the shape of one's monastic garb, but remain inwardly the same weakling who seeks support, who wants to lean on someone else, who wants to escape the responsibility of self-discovery.

Who has not been through that process of a search for an unknown goal, picking up a mantra here, an initiation there, baptism, circumcision, sitting with crossed legs, hoping for the arising of the kundalini, the mystic serpent in the tree of knowledge, searching for God without knowing oneself, bathing in holy waters of sacred rivers, protecting oneself with charms and amulets, prayers and offerings. But who has asked himself honestly and sincerely what he is searching for and why? And without that answer the truth will not come, because we have made already in advance an image or a concept of the "truth", as I want it to be, which is the ideal "self" which is now the object of all search.

What was that enlightenment which made Siddhartha the seeker speak to his companions with supreme confidence: "Now I know!" His first utterances to them are found in what is called the Sutta in which he set arolling the wheel of truth (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta), in which he outlined the four noble truths: the fact that there is conflict (*dukkha*) in the experience of impermanence (*anicca*), because that "self" which strives for continuance and security refuses

to see that there is no “self” (*anatta*). But that is the formulation of his realisation; that is the essence of his first and second sermons which made his companions see what he had seen that night of light.

The four noble truths are a marvellous compact of irrefutable logic which goes far beyond the logic of thought. But logic does not convert the heart; it may set the mind thinking in a particular direction. But still, logic is a conclusion of a syllogism; it is not a solution of a problem. Logic may be accurate within the limits of thought; but, thought has its own limitations in memory and experience which have their individual conviction of the truth of fact, but which will always remain within that framework of thought, which is dependent on tradition and education, on conditions of environment from birth to death, which is based on the history of many ages with their superstitions and beliefs, race segregation and religions taboos of fear.

Thus, to see the truth of the four noble truths—not to accept their truth as one who is a born Buddhist—there must be a totally unconditioned state of mind which is not prejudiced either in favour or in rejection. There must be a mind in which thought has come to a stand-still. Thought which is a reference to authority is a reflection of past experiences, an attachment to what makes a search for security a necessity. When thought ceases to search for a solution of a problem, then there is no ideal of expectation, of hope, of salvation. As long as there is a search for an ideal, there is also the fear of non-attainment, however strong one’s desire, however sincere one’s endeavour. It is this fear which distorts and which therefore prevents a direct insight without expectation. Fear is a distortion, for it shrinks away from the obvious: it is an uneasy anticipation of a possible loss. Such loss may be purely imaginary, but it represents the loss of what is most precious. It is not the loss of health, or property, or even of life, but it is the fear of losing what they stand for. For, what is the worth of life in sickness; what is the use of mere existence in poverty; what is life if there is no continuance

after death? Death may be a certainty which we all have to accept; and when death comes, the body and the mind will probably be so weak that the passing away will not even be noticed. It is not that passing away which causes fear, but the fact that everything which had value and which constituted life, the fact that all that which made the "I" must go, the fact of total insecurity and lack of dependence, that causes fear of the loss of everything. Fear of being left unprotected, physically, mentally, spiritually naked, no body, nobody, no "self".

It is too much for a mind which has been nurtured throughout many ages, to let all that go without anxiety and without a feeling of insecurity. And so, that mind throughout the many ages has invented and conceived a mental image of security, a system of insurance, a concept of hope, in which there can be continuation of existence, where life as it is wanted can now be resumed, perhaps under more ideal conditions in spheres of endless happiness, but still a continuance which alone can give security in this universal impermanence.

That ideal is provided by religion with its hope of eternal life and salvation. That concept has penetrated for many centuries the thoughts of scientists and philosophers, not only in their mediaeval search for an elixir of life, Ambrosia, the food of the immortals, for the philosophers' stone which could change the substance of metal into gold, but which even now forms the basis of belief of a substance supporting the phenomena, of a soul as the immaterial and immortal part of man (though not of animal), as a vital principle of man's mental powers.

If such beliefs, though modified, still persist to this scientific age of space travel and surgical discoveries, how strong they would have been two or three thousand years ago, when man had nothing but his eyes to see, and the uncertainty of knowledge to rely on!

Then, what was it that prince Siddhartha saw and which made him into an all-enlightened Buddha? He had seen the valuelessness

of property and left it all behind. He had seen the danger of family affections and broken off those ties. He had seen death to the point of starvation in self-mortification, till the conscious mind failed him to lead him further to the ideal, his ideal concept of truth. And when all those ideals failed to materialise, he saw his failure as failure; he saw his striving for the ideal of perfection as a desire for self-attainment; he even saw the uselessness of giving such a message to a world steeped in spirituality more than this twentieth century is steeped in materialism. He had to give up; and he did give up. He left his companions, he gave up the ascetic life, as he had renounced earlier his life of luxury. There was nothing any teacher could teach him, for he had reached the states of mental absorption where mind concentrates on nothingness and where perception itself becomes imperceptible.

There was nothing more to do. It was literally the end of the road. And so the Bodhisatta sat down at the foot of a tree. He ate a meal of milk-rice which was not meant for him but offered to him with the mistaken intention that he was a tree spirit. He bathed in the nearby river and threw the bowl into the river, where it got caught in an eddy, floated in that swirl a little upstream and then sank. Again the Bodhisatta sat down, obviously getting reconciled with the failure of his strivings. Whatever he had learned was the knowledge of information, what we would call book-knowledge now-a-days. And then he knew that he learned nothing! And he knew of no further road or method to obtain new learning.

But he had learned ignorance! It was the experiencing of not knowing, and at the same time the experience of the knowledge thereof. And in that experience he saw the whole panorama of a search for knowledge leading to a search for action. For mental action to achieve and obtain knowledge, the search for the satisfaction of that desire for knowledge without which the process of thought cannot proceed, where desire has lost its object, Where striving ceases because there is no goal.

Ignorance

It was not knowledge, but a lack of knowledge (*avijja*) which opened a vista of insight which has no object, but which is seeing just what is. And with that insight he understood that his very search for knowledge was inspired by his lack of knowledge, that his search for knowledge which was ignorance was a search for action, action which was desire for attainment, desire for becoming, desire for escape. It was the beginning of his understanding of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), according to which the lack of knowledge produces a desire for becoming knowledgeable, in which the new becoming, as a new creation, can continue that which was not known (*avijja paccaya sankhāra*); the thirst for knowledge had become the thirst to create, to produce, to continue; the simple not-knowing (*avijja*) had become the opposite (*sankhāra*); being was becoming! It was insight in not-knowing, which gave enlightenment, an understanding of all that is.

An interesting, although perhaps fanciful, connection can be seen in the very designation the Buddha himself used in reference to himself. There is first of all the total absence of the term “I” when the Buddha refers to his liberated state after his enlightenment. It was the discovery of the absence of an “ego” which is the thread running through the four noble truths, the formulas of dependent origination, thereby making his non-self (*anattā*) doctrine the pivot

of his teaching, the hub of the wheel of truth, the basic realisation of enlightenment and Nibbāna.

I refer, of course, to the designation of Tathāgata, which has been wisely left untranslated in modern versions of the suttas. From the very beginning, at the first meeting after his enlightenment, when the Buddha's former companions addressed him as "comrade" (*āvuso*), a term which even now no junior monk would use in addressing his senior (*thera*) in the order, the Buddha pointed out the distinction in attainment and learning. It was not as an old friend and comrade that he should be hailed, because he had truly "gone the whole way"; he was a Tathāgata. The relation of comradeship, of searchers for a common goal, had gone: it had all gone! And so, when he now came to them with his newly discovered truth, there was in him no searcher any more; he had come, as one who had come as he was. Not only had he found the truth, but he was the truth, actually experiencing the true state of all things, actually seeing things as they are in the "thus-ness" of their ultimate reality. This "thusness" of being what one is, is without relationship. It is complete in itself, it is perfection, it is truth.

There is the *actual* life of experience, of conditionality, evolution and involution, seen as life and death, as individuality, as personality; the life of "self" in relationship. Then there is the *ideal* life of striving for realisation, for attainment, for becoming, a life of escape from the actual which is felt as a conflict: it is the life of a "self", transcending, sublimating, searching for the absolute. And then there is the real life, in which there is no more search for an ideal and no more escape from the actual; it is a life of "thusness" which cannot see and experience from the point of the little "self", which cannot project into a greater "Self" because there is the realisation that relationship is opposition, that in totality there can be no division of opposition, that without relation there cannot be exploitation, opposition or conflict. It is the real life which is thus, and in which there is no place for "self" or "Self".

What is, does not matter. It is neither good nor bad. It is not a goal; it has no purpose. For, all those things are the composites of ignorance. And when ignorance is gone, there is no search for wisdom. When ignorance is seen as ignorance, that is the truth. And when the search has ceased, there is no goal, no walker on the road. Then, all questioning as to “what then is?” is seen as utterly futile; for, all compositions (*sankhāra*) are the decompositions of a searcher, of a decaying mind. And when the searcher ceases to search, there is no search any more. And when there is no search, where is the searcher?

The opening statement of what has been accepted as the formula of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*), that compositions arise in dependence on ignorance (*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*) deserves a little more attention to get at its full meaning. “*Saṅkhāra*” is whatever is composed, that is made or put together (*sankaroti*). Now, whatever is composed is of an artificial nature: a combination, a growth, a fabrication, an amalgamation, a formulation of what was not thus formed before. It may be a development, an evolutionary aspect, a joining of forces, a mechanical grouping, a union of labour, a syllogism of thought, a cooperation of action; it is always a formation which in its many parts gives the appearance of unity, of oneness, of single-mindedness. Its strength lies in this union which is its very existence, as the strength of an army lies in the co-ordination of its various units and without which unity there would be no strength, but only chaos. So it is with the physical body and its organs; thus it is with the mind with its memory, its views, its resolves, its dispositions, its emotions and volitions. It is only a well co-ordinated mind that has the strength of reason, as it is a well co-ordinated body that is healthy and active and able to respond.

Composition then is formation in action. And if there is a formation of action which is not co-ordinated in its composition, such action can only produce confusion, chaos and conflict. Now the

question arises: is there any formation of action which is not composed for the purpose of achieving a result? In other words, is there any action, which is not bent upon its reaction?

But that would mean that any action which is formed, planned or executed for the achievement of a result is only a reaction; it is an action which is composed of many parts, not the least being its intention (*cetanā*) to obtain a result. The result may never be obtained, the cause may never produce its intended effect, as there are so many conditions on whose active participation and coordination the success of an action depends. But the goal was there in the intention, the volition, the will, without which there would not have been a spur to action. That means, however, that such action as a composite of inner strength and ability would never have become active without that inducement of motive, goal, etc. etc. And that means that such action is always reactive. A purposeful action is never free because it depends on its purpose.

Now, coming back to our first thesis that all compositions are dependent on the factors which compose it, the shining truth of this proposition that “formations arise in dependence on ignorance” (*avijjā-paccayaā sankhārā*) acquires a completely new meaning, which is not a revelation, but an intelligent awakening of insight. Things, events, actions, intentions, in short all formed or arranged compositions, are what they are, because they are formed and composed; and they would not be what they are, that is, they would not have been formed, they would not have arisen, if not in ignorance, in not-knowing, in mis-direction, in mis-understanding, in the absence of insight (*avijja*). Had there been insight, that is, a fully awakened intelligence of the nature of composition, of formation, of volition, there would not have been that reaction which is of ignorance tending towards a result.

Complexes

The second term in this series of dependent originations is then *sankhāra*, which literally means “formations”. It is a very general term and that makes it all the more difficult to get at its precise meaning. But the early commentaries are here very helpful. Various other translations have been attempted, such as “synergies¹” and “determinations²”, to mention just a few of the more unusual ones. The term “determination” was strongly upheld by Nyanamoli Thera in his contribution to an article on “*anicca*” (impermanence) for the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, and he showed quite some reluctance on his part before he finally agreed to drop this term in this connotation, reserving it for the more usual meaning of determination as decisiveness in the mental state of resolution (*adhimokkha*). Still, there was a rather sound basis for his choice, because these “*sankhāras*” determine in their composition, combination and other relationships the precise nature of the form of mental states.

Without going too deeply into the philosophic and analytic constitution of a thought-unit, as explained in great detail in the Abhidharma literature on the subject, I may just mention that there are 52 constituents, of which seven are always present, making up with many of the remaining factors (*cetasikā*) a great variety of thought, skilful or otherwise, with their basis on the fun-

¹Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids

²Nyanamoli Thera

damental “roots” of love, hate and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). Originally—and with that I mean before our monk scholars introduced their interpretationsi—there was only the fourfold division of thought as sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), ideation (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*). And even then, this general term “ideation” (*saṅkhāra*) seems to have been an interloper, a substitution for volition (*cetanā*). Thus we have the thought in its various degrees of development of reception (where a physical contact is sensed and thus received by the mind just being aroused from its unconscious stream or *bhavaṅgasota*), of perception (where the sense-doors were being opened and a faculty of recognition came into action without as yet apprehending the full impact of the contact), of conception (where an idea or concept was being formed and the resultant recognition was being accepted or rejected), even before a complete state of awareness could blossom out in full consciousness. It is this third stage of the growth of a thought, that is, after reception and perception (*vedanā, saññā*), that constitutes the act of formation (*saṅkhāra*) of a concept. This is the moment of grasping without understanding. It is the element of volition (*cetanā*), which determines the character, which forms the nature, which constitutes the distinctive mark of a particular thought. With full consciousness such volition would be responsible for its reaction; and thus volition (*cetanā*) is equated by the Buddha unequivocally with *kamma*.

This one term, however, has been spun out, divided, analysed, classified, till the commentators of the middle ages (5th Century) had made it into 50 components (of which volition as *cetanā* was kept as one). These fifty components are the mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), which together with sensation (*vedanā*) and perception (*saññā*) now make up the list of 52 mental formations (*saṅkhāra*).

But, general as it may appear, this term is very much specialised in this context of thought-analysis. For, in its original meaning it stands for anything which is composed (*saṅkhata*), physical or mental. And that leaves out only one “element” (*dhatu*), that of Nibbāna

which is the unconditioned (*asankhata*). Here then we discover a new sidelight on the term *sankhāra*, namely as the conditioned state of everything outside Nibbāna. And so, the “formed” become the “conditioned” without exception; and it is with this understanding that we can now proceed with the formulation of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), that “formations arise in dependence on ignorance” (*avijjapaccaya-sankhāra*).

Ignorance is not the cause of formations, for ignorance is not a positive state, and it can only induce certain conditions, promoting their evolution by its presence, or providing an opportunity of involution by its absence. It is this relationship of conditionality which must be kept in mind throughout, as in this process there is no place for causation, creation, or independent spontaneous origination; for, whatever arises, arises in dependence on conditions, and it too will cease, in dependence on the cessation of those conditions.

The conditions of which we hear so much are obviously not the general compositions which constitute the many forms of physical and biological existence. They are the compositions, the compounds of the many forms of inhibitions, the instinctive taboos, the induced restraints, which are the self-protective defences of a weak individual against an overbearing society; they are also the excesses, indulgences, outbursts of violence, intimidations, which are the expressions of that same “self”, which fears in isolation, which withdraws in opposition, and which bursts its bonds to prove its strength in the united effort of the mass. Such are the complexes of mental sickness which cannot be cured in their effects, but which have to be understood in their conditioning source. It is thus the lack of understanding (*avijja*) which conditions (*paccaya*) the arising of such complexes (*sankhāra*). These complexes are equated with karmic volitions, for the lack of understanding is not a mere absence of knowledge or ignorance, but a refusal to see, a fear to know, which in itself is another complex, preventing an awakening of intelligence which alone can bring about a pure understanding of insight.

It is also the link of these complexes with a subsequent mode of thinking which brings this process so far into a new perspective.

The Conscious Link

All complexes as thought-problems are not actual problems, but have arisen in ignorance, which is the non-understanding of the present moment. A complex arises with the passing away of an experience. Whereas an experiencing is an active movement of living in which there is only the experiencing without identification, in a way as a wave in the ocean has no separate existence, no discernible identity, no measurable quantity, no static individuality, but is just a process of rolling on, being formed, raised and dissolved in the action of evolution and involution, of becoming and ceasing, not as opposites but as different approaches—so experiencing in its intensity of the process does not discern an experiencer as the producer or the owner, the substance or the soul of the experience. The experience may continue as a memory, but that is not experiencing. The experience may be remembered by the experiencer, but at that time of remembrance there is no experiencer, as there is no experiencing any more in the act of experiencing, too, there is no division between the subject and the object, and hence there is no opposition, no desire, no regret, no conflict. All that comes later, when experiencing has ceased and has become the memory of an experience, the property of an experiencer. Both, experience which is memory as object, and the experiencer who is the subject, have divided and split, so that the experiencer can continue in his experience. Thus,

we live in our memory. It is memory which makes the subject, so that it can continue, retain the object and call it back at will.

This revival of a past memory of an experience gone by requires the active participation of an originator in the future, who must both have experienced in the past, remembered in the present and who then can continue the experience in the future. Thus, it is the will to continue, the will to become in the future, the will to possess the experience, which now creates a possessor, a personification of that will. It is this conscious will which produces the link of the past through the present with the future.

The past, as we have seen already, is mere ignorance; but it is in this formed ignorance that mental formations arise and now continue their complex activity, so as to constitute the conscious link (*patisandhi viññāna*), sometimes called the rebirth-consciousness, the first thought in a new life, without which no continuation is possible.

This volition for continuity is the desire for rebirth, the linking up with an unborn future, the only activity possible for a self-projecting individuality, which now becomes the actor out of his own action. Thus, the actor is the reaction of ignorance, the result of conditioning complexes, the evolution of what has been involved.

This relinking consciousness (*patisandhi-viññāna*) is only called thus as it is the first conscious thought in a new life. But, the new life is never thought of as a continuation of the old, not as an effect created by a cause which is self-characteristic, but only as a result from conditions, on which it depended for its arising, although not for its production. This new thought in the new life is not different from other thoughts, as they are all dependent on conditions for their arising, and, dependent on the cessation of those conditions, for their disappearance. There is no universal presence in any of the forms of existence to create, maintain and dissolve them; and therefore they are in a way self-creative without determining either in principle or in cessation.

Where most religions and religious philosophies are a form of determinism in which a goal of striving is determined under many various forms of a creative principle: God in Christianity, the principle of truth (Tao) in Taoism, the Absolute in Brahmanism, there is no such ultimate principle found in Buddhism, where origination, as well as cessation, is not determined by a goal of achievement, but is dependent in its arising on conditions, and on the disappearance of which there follows also naturally the cessation of what had arisen.

This kind of indeterminism may be confused with a spontaneous creativeness of some internal or spiritual entity, which then would take over the functions of a god-creator. Such self-creativity is not known in Theravāda Buddhism, where the approach to origination is neither internal nor external, that is, where there is no ultimate creator as an eternal and absolute principle of creation, neither an internal self-creative principle of spontaneous combustion, such as an eternal soul, the *ātman* which has forgotten its source, the *paramātman*. But there is an approach to this self-creative principle, when the basis of all complexes is said to be found in ignorance (*avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*). This ignorance, however, as we have seen already, is not a principle of action and hence not creative, for it is the absence of insight. Just as darkness is the absence of light and thereby prevents the faculty of sight to function normally, and can therefore not be said to be the cause of blindness, but only the condition for not seeing correctly—so ignorance is not a creative principle of delusion, but rather a delusive principle or “creation”. It is in the delusion of ignorance that complexes are formed, created which then naturally develop into conflicts. Ignorance remains a condition, but is never seen as a creator or absolute principle. It is not “in the beginning” that there was ignorance; there is ignorance throughout till there is insight; there is the delusion of “self” till there is the understanding of non-self (*anatta*). Then the little “self” is not transformed into a super “self” (*paramātman*), but is dissolved in understanding together with the ignorance from which

it arose. With the cessation of ignorance, there is the cessation of complexes (*avijjā-nirodhā sankhāra-nirodho*). Dependent on complexes is formed a link in consciousness, but that link to rebirth is never a substance, an entity, a soul; it remains a process of arising till it ceases in cessation. Once it has arisen, however, there is the natural process of conception leading to birth, and birth leading to death.

This process of ignorance (*avijja*), forming itself (*sankhāra*) into thought (*viññāṇa*), in which the past is becoming the present, conditions producing their effects, memory projecting the ideal, is now repeated all over again in space and time. Thus, past conditions produce effects in the present; but those present effects become vitalised and thereby become conditions by themselves in the present, which then will produce further effects in the future.

It is on this basis that Buddhaghosa divides the entire set-up of twelve links with their eleven propositions (of which we have seen so far three links with two propositions: *avijja-paccayaā sankhāra; sankhāra-paccayaā viññāṇam*) into twenty links, spread out in time and space over three life-durations of the past, the present and the future. Five conditions in the past produce five effects in the present; and these five effects in the present become five conditions in the present by present action; and then these five present conditions produce further five effects in the future. To arrive at this formula he equates the conditions of the past with the conditions in the present, and the effects of the present with the effects in the future, by putting them, as it were, in two parallel columns:

1	<i>avijja</i>	—		
2	<i>saṅkhāra</i>	—		
—		<i>taṇhā</i>	8	5 conditions of the past
—		<i>upādāna</i>	9	
—		<i>bhava</i>	10	
3	<i>viññāṇa</i>	—		
4	<i>nāma-rūpa</i>	<i>jāti</i>	11	5 effects in the present
5	<i>saḷayatana</i>	—		
6	<i>phassa</i>	<i>jarā-marana</i>	12	
7	<i>vedanā</i>	—		
8	<i>taṇhā</i>	—		
9	<i>upādāna</i>	—		5 conditions in the present
10	<i>bhava</i>	—		
—		<i>avijja</i>	1	
—		<i>saṅkhāra</i>	2	
11	<i>jāti</i>	<i>viññāṇa</i>	3	
12	<i>jarā-maraṇa</i>	<i>nāma-rūpa</i>	4	5 effects for the future
—		<i>saḷayatana</i>	5	
—		<i>phassa</i>	6	
—		<i>vedanā</i>	7	

Reactions

Having now arrived at relinking consciousness (*patisandhi-viññāna*), which has become the present effect of past conditions, namely, ignorance and complexes, the new thought has to give form or name or identity (*nāma*) to matter (*rūpa*), by which process a material experience can be recognised and identified. It has to be so, because without this identification all past information would be useless. These mental formations (*sankhāra*) together with this relinking consciousness (*viññāna*) are truly a source of information, putting an experience into form, so that it can be recognised. It is the process of retention all over again, when thought as memory succeeds in retaining the past and producing it in the present. Thus, in dependence on consciousness arises mind in matter (*viññāna-paccayā nāma-rūpam*).

It is matter being judged and then classified as experience; and the experience being in-formed or shaped becomes now as material evidence or memory. There are no two identities as the mind and the body which act independently or interact one upon the other. They are treated here as a single unit of mentalised matter (*nāma-rūpam*). Matter, as a material object, derives its psychological importance from the concept of the subject, the mind. It is the subjective approach of the “I” who wants to possess and retain an experience which makes the experiencing an object for retention in memory. Without this retention there is no possibility of continuance, for it

is only in memory, that is in the frozen thought, that there is an “I”, an actor, separate from action which is past. Thus, *nāma-rūpa* or conceptualised matter is equated with *jāti* or birth, in which there is the evolution of individuality through the sense-organs (*salāyatana*), contact (*phassa*) and sensation (*vedanā*).

This is the individuality group of five, which constitutes life in physical action as the result of the *kamma*-formations in the previous life; and thus it is a chain of reaction, physical action put in form by mental action. It is the cycle of birth (*jāti*), or becoming, through decay (*jarā*) to death *marana*, which is not just the cycle of a life-span of 70 years or so, but the cycle even of a single act of wilful and intentional thought. For, thought arises in the memory, it conditions the present and attempts to project its continuation into the future of a next thought.

The analysis and division of this group of five effects in the present: Consciousness + conceptualised matter + the six senses + contact + sensation = birth + death, is not very important and rather obvious. It is the new thought (*viññāna*) which informs or gives life to its mental reaction on matter (*nāma-rūpa*), where the subjective mind lays hold of the objective matter. This reaction is possible through the six senses (*salāyatana*), five of the body and the sixth being the mind, the internal organs of which act upon the external world of events through contact (*phassa*), which then results in sensation (*vedanā*).

Dependent on conscious thought (*viññāna-paccaya*) arises the relationship of mind and matter (*nāma-rūpa*). Dependent on this psycho-physical relationship in thought (*nāma-rūpa-paccayā*) are brought into play the six senses (*salāyatana*): the eye and sight, the ear and sound, the tongue and taste, the nose and smell, the entire body and touch and the mind with thought. Thus thought produces the relationship of mind and matter; and it is also thought which is produced by the relationship of the internal and external sense-organs. This is contact. Dependent on the six senses arises

contact (*salāyatana-paccayā phasso*); and on contact depends the arising of sensation (*phassa-paccayā vedanā*).

Re-activation

With this we have reached the most crucial juncture of the entire process; for, up to now we have been dealing with the five effects in the present which resulted from the five conditions of the past. When those present effects are not re-vitalised, they will cease according to the same law of origination and cessation: Dependent on the ending of sensation, there is the non-arising of craving (*vedanā-nirodhā tanhā-nirodho*). When present effects are not reconditioned in the present, they will naturally cease without becoming new causes of craving, clinging and becoming (*tanhā, upādāna, bhava*) with their equivalents of ignorance (*avijja*) and *kamma*-formations (*saṅkhāra*). Then, when there is no more new *kamma*, there will be no more rebirth in the future.

But, when the effects of the past are re-vitalised, fertilised and planted out in the present, that is, when we sow the seeds of new *kamma* in this life, their effects may be expected in the future. And the whole wheel of Samsāra will take another turn before *kamma* will have exhausted its inborn energy of reproduction.

The chief question which now remains is: Can there be sensation (*vedanā*) which does not produce desire (*tanhā*)? The formula of dependent origination merely states that desire arises in dependence on sense-activity (*vedanā-paccayā tanhā*). This is not a law of causality, of creation, according to which all feelings must produce craving. Sensations are only the conditions without which there is

no possibility for craving to arise. Sensations are the activities of the six senses through contact in the six sense-organs. It is in those six organs that sense-objects are received and perceived, that concepts are conceived; they are the instruments, the soil, the conditions which are necessary in the process of production or evolution, but which do not in themselves produce or cause the effects. And thus we hear of the Buddha being tired of the quarrelsome monks, which made him go to the solitude of the forest. He also experienced thirst and fatigue, as a result of which he requested Ānanda to give him some drinking water, and to spread his outer robe for him to rest a while. These were not acts of desire, which have a purpose in view beyond the immediate "now"; and so those actions did not project into a future beyond the immediate need. In other words, his need did not grow out into greed.

Our problem is not how to overcome greed, but can the sensation of need be prevented to become reborn in greed? It is not in the resistance to greed by means of renunciation that greed can be overcome. In such activity one is not honestly looking for an understanding of the cause of greed, but merely searching for a means to get rid of the problem of greed. The desire to get rid of desire, in order to overcome rebirth, which is the result of desire, is not a serious quest. Either it is a mere playing with words, with semantics which can never result in clarity beyond the word; or more likely, it is an attempt to evade any enquiry.

It is the mind which constructs the hurdles, and then complains of obstruction. Thus, it is not in mere recognition of the fact that the mind is the cause of all confusion; for, that will still leave the seeking mind in confusion as to what to do about it all. It is the seeking itself which must cease. Instead of trying to remove the obstacles, let us see what they are. Sensations are not obstacles. Only craving for, and dependence on sensations cause clinging and becoming (*upādāna, bhava*). We cling to sensations, because in sensations we can continue. In continuance there is becoming which

is rebirth. And that is the cause of sensations becoming craving. It is not the sensation which is to be shunned, but the motive of the senses, the motive of satisfaction, the motive of rebirth. Why do I want rebirth? Because that is the only way in which to continue the gratification of the senses. Because without rebirth there is no continuance, and hence no motive for action. Because without action there is no actor; without continuation there is no motive for a search; without search there is no searcher, no actor, no "self"! And so, clinging is necessary for self-continuance, as without "self" there is no motive for searching. Thus, this "I"-concept is the motive of desire, the object of clinging, the subject of becoming. "I" am all that; and all that is necessary for the upkeep of that "self"-concept.

Becoming

There is no escape possible when I am myself the spring-plank, the action, the motion and the motive. And thus any act of escaping is an act of ignorance, which conditions all craving, clinging and becoming. There is no possibility for an escape from these conditions as effects in the present, for they constitute life as we live it. But it is possible that they are not further used to become conditions themselves in the present. And then they will not be able to condition the future.

Removing the fruits of a tree will not prevent its growth and productivity. It is only at the root that must be found that which makes growth possible. And that root is the “I”-concept which wants to continue and thereby gets involved in becoming, which makes action into *kamma*, conditions into effects, life into conflict.

We have seen already what those effects in the future will be, for they are the same as the effects now in the present, from which we try to escape; they are the thought that binds the mind that forms the matter to which we cling, the senses which are the instruments of contact and sensation, which is life in becoming in conflict and in cessation. Any act towards cessation is only an act of becoming. It is in cessation that we must cease, not in becoming. But, any desire for cessation is still a desire; and that is an act of becoming.

Thus, there is no escape through striving. But when there is understanding that not all sensation must result in craving, only

then is it possible to use the senses to see and feel and understand without purpose just what is. Then there is no further motive and hence no craving, no clinging, no becoming.

How to Cease?

It is in understanding things, events, ourselves as we are, that becoming ceases. Because, what am I? I am the reaction and the projection, I am the past and I am the future, I am clinging and craving. Without all that there is no “I”. Can there be a purpose to continue, if there is no “I”? And yet it is only the “I”-concept that wants to continue in the gratification of its senses. Seeing that the “I” is craving for becoming, is also seeing that the “I” is only a projection of a memory through which the past can become the future. Thus, the “I” is but a reaction to a memory of an experience, which is projected as an individual, in order to experience that continuation in the future. And, life as *actions of the past* with *reactions in the present*, which become conditions in the present to produce effects in the future—that life is but a chain of dependent origination from ignorance to volition, from becoming to cessation, a beginningless ending with a never-ending becoming.

There is no beginning in Samsāra and there is no end to Samsāra as long as Samsāra is seen as a continuous stream of lives in which there is rebirth, as long as there is “self”; for “I” am that Samsāra. But when it is seen that Samsāra is a misconception through ignorance, a complex of conflicts which link up with desire for a continuation of a delusion, then craving becomes impossible in sensation, then what is clung to is seen as false, as distorted, as meaningless. Then there is freedom and deliverance, understanding and insight.

Without wanting it, there is cessation.
 Without seeking it, there is truth.
 Without knowing it, there is insight.

This is, of course, the solution of the problem of conflict when experienced in impermanence (*anicca-dukkhā saññā*), a solution through the discovery that the problem of conflict is dependent on the ignorance of self-delusion. It is in the perception that in the void of conflict (*dukkha-anatta saññā*) there is no “self” and hence no conflict, that there can be instantaneous enlightenment as experienced by the bodhisatta in the night of his contemplation, which brought him to Buddhahood. It is this insight (*vipassanā*) into the nature of sense-experiences, when need does not become greed, which therefore brings an end to this continuous cycle of evolution, and involution, spontaneous because not volitional, immediate because without effort, final because there is no “self” to continue. It is this insight which gave realisation to the Bodhisatta, making him see things as they are (*yathā bhūta nāya-dassana*), and to hundreds of his followers on the path of insight, which is meditation as contemplation (*vipassanā*). This was possible within the chain of dependent origination only at one stage, when the five effects in the present are not reconditioned to become conditional causes in the present for future effects, that is, when sensations do not become craving.

Craving is, of course, the result of sensations, the reactions in the six senses; but that does not mean that all sensations have to become craving. “In that case”, said the Buddha, “a release from Samsāra would not be possible”. But, because there is the possibility of being intelligently aware of the working of the senses, that not all sensation, which is an effect, must become a cause in itself. Only sensation which is not understood with insight may become the occasion for the arising of attachment through ignorance (*vedanā-paccayā tanhā*).

But when there is no cessation of the grasping of the senses, when sensations of need are becoming a source of greed (*vedanā-paccayā tanhā*), then this greed for becoming becomes the basis for holding (*tanhā-paccayā upādānam*), the holding on to the “I”-concept which wants to continue, which in fact must continue in ignorance, if it is not made to cease in understanding. Then the present effects become the conditions for rebirth (*upādana-paccayā bhavo*), and the cycle of the wheel of Samsāra will roll on again and again. For, on this desire for becoming is dependent the new thought, the new life, the future succeeding the present, to-morrow, next life (*bhava-paccayā jāti*).

A short run over these twelve factors, each one conditioning the next step, may be helpful in obtaining a complete glance at their inter-dependence in arising and ceasing, and of the totality of the process of evolution.

- 1.) *Avijja* (ignorance) is the fundamental ignorance as found in universal energy, in repulsion and attraction, giving the illusion of substance in existence.
- 2.) *Sankhāra* (formations) is the evolutional and blind will to exist, with its striving for survival as a group.
- 3.) *Vinñāna* (consciousness) is the reproductive energy to survive as an individual in its most primitive form.
- 4.) *Nāma-rūpa* (mind-matter) is the functional need of formation, when energy becomes organised.
- 5.) *Salāyatana* (six senses) is the sensational recognition in biological existence.
- 6.) *Phassa* (contact) is the reactional distinction of individualism in action.

- 7.) *Vedanā* (sensation) is the emotional distinction in individual feelings when action may become entangled with desire.
- 8.) *Taṇhā* (craving) is the discriminative distinction between likes and dislikes.
- 9.) *Upādāna* (clinging) is the egotistical attachment and rejection through reflection.
- 10.) *Bhava* (becoming) is the emotional will to live passionately and the desire to reproduce.
- 11.) *Jāti* (birth) is the conscious life awakening to, the intellect wanting to survive.
- 12.) *Marana* (death) is the problematic opposition to the impermanence of life when recognising its dissolution.

This is the traditional chain of conditionality (*paticca-samuppāda*), leading from ignorance and birth to sorrow, conflict and death. In the teaching of the Buddha, especially in the four noble truths, there is the first statement that all compositions are decomposable, that whatever is breakable will break, that every complex is a conflict (*sabbe saṅkhārā anicca*. *sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*). It is the universal truth of conflict (*dukkha-sacca*) which is founded on the composite nature of all that is formed. This is followed immediately by the second noble truth about the cause of conflict (*dukkha-samudaya*), which has been enlarged into the doctrine of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*), as this has been considered so far: whatever has arisen arises in dependence on conditions. It is the conditioned existence of all things, events, living beings in birth and death. This again is followed logically by the third noble truth about the cessation of conflict (*dukkha-nirodha*): whatever ceases, does so in dependence on the cessation of those formations which conditioned their arising. This is the doctrine

of dependent cessation: “with the cessation of ignorance, there is also the cessation of volitional activities, of karmic formations, of the will-to-become” (*avijjā-nirodhā saṅkhāra-nirodho*), right down to the end which is the cessation of the entire complex of conflict (*evam-etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti*).

Now, if it is ignorance that has brought about the conflict, it will be naturally the cessation of ignorance alone which can solve the problem of conflict. The cessation of ignorance is understanding: and it is understanding alone which can see that conflict is no problem when there is insight into the nature of conflict. It must be understood then that this conflict has been brought about by a search for an ideal. It was the rejection of the actual, the impermanence of all, the search of an ideal, thought of as permanent, which was the basic cause of conflict. And so, the understanding of the motive of the search, and the understanding of the nature, composition and goal of the ideal, will lay bare the nature of the complex which became the conflict.

Thus, the process of cessation would have to begin with the fact that there is a conflict, whether it is wanted or not. In analysing conflict, its nature becomes clear, for it is a conflict between the real and the ideal, the real which I actually experience and reject in my search, and the ideal which is expected to provide a reason for living, a goal for striving, a purpose in life.

The nature of this conflict (as we are calling this psychological obsession) is described in the Pāli texts under the various names of decay (*jarā*), death (*marana*), sorrow (*soka*), pain (*dukkha*), grief (*domanassa*), despair (*upāyāsa*), dwindling in vitality (*ayuno saṅhāni*), dissolution of the aggregates (*khandhānam bheda*), lamenting (*parideva*), bodily discomfort (*kāyikā asāta*), mental disagreement (*cetasikā asāta*). This list of assorted experiences covers a vast, and, probably, the entire field of pain, physical as well as mental; but a mere repetition thereof will not provide deeper insight. What then is the common factor, the essence, per-

haps the source of all this disharmony? Watching them one by one closely to understand the true nature of disharmony (*saccā-nāṇa*), its functioning (*kicca-nāṇa*) and its accomplishment (*kata-nāṇa*), what do we see, what do we understand of this process?

Whether the experience is physical or psychological, there is always the experiencing of loss (*vyaśana*) in disharmony, in dissatisfaction, in non-attainment, in separation. It is the loss of property, of prestige, of health, of life, of confidence, of dependence, of hope, of prospects, covering the entire field of body and mind. What is this loss? What is lost? To whom does the loss occur? And why is it felt as a loss? It is always the loss of something or someone, which or who gave physical, mental, sentimental, political, religious support. If it did not, its disappearance would not be felt. If the disappearance would be of something or someone antagonistic to our way of living, it would not be felt as a loss, but rather as a gain: one obstacle less! Loss, therefore, is not of the object, such as possessions or relations; but it is a loss of something which is myself, with which I have identified myself, without which I feel unsupported, let down, lost. Then I am lost, because the child which died was my child, my hope, my continuation, my ambition, the goal of all my work, the purpose of all my striving, the only chance for survival of self. Thus, I am the loss, not the loser. As I am nothing but this striving and ambitious "I", there is a deep sense of conflict, which lies much deeper than frustration. The "I" must cling to support itself, and when the support breaks down, the "I" is lost. It is then the "I" fighting to retain or to regain a lost "I". That is the conflict which is the base of all disharmony which is felt as loss.

What is lost?: Self. To whom does the loss occur?: Self. Why is it felt as a loss?: Because it is myself, my loss.

When this is seen clearly, there is no remedy, no repair, no substitute, for there is only one thing that is wanted and that is "self" which now feels it is lost. One can pray to God for grace, sacrifice to the Gods for help, turn to substitutes to forget; but there is no

remedy for this loss to self. And this loss will remain as a conflict until the true source of the loss which is “self” is truly seen for what it is. When all substitutes are wiped off, there is a blank: How can there be any action for recovery, when there is no “self” either as actor, or as a goal? It is no more a problem, because there is no answer to an impossible question: How can I be cured when there is no “I”, when the “I” is seen, understood and lost?

In this seeming despair, it is only the hopelessness of the future which causes the conflict as long as there remains an “I” who wants to become. But, if the loss is not seen as a loss of prospects in the future, but as a loss of a delusion in the present moment of realisation, then there is a sense of relief when the burden is taken away. Nobody can take this burden away, because there is no burden; it was only my own making, my own creation, my own ambition, my own “self”. And when there is no need to worry about the future of such a delusion, there is a sense of relief which, metaphorically, allows me to raise my head and see. I can see that there is a possibility of seeing without distortion, without aiming, that I can be alive without being “I”, that there may be an approach to understanding which is not the exploitation of learning, that there may be love which is not possessive, and which therefore can never be lost, can never become a conflict.

That gives confidence (*saddha*) without expectation. That is not faith and hope. Faith is a belief in the impossible, but confidence is the beginning of a realisation of being on the right path; hope is a belief in attaining the unattained in some unknown future, but confidence does not rely on the future when it begins to see that all conflict and its dissolution lie in the present moment.

Such confidence is given by the understanding of conflict in the light of the teaching of the Buddha. It is not the outcome of a search for an ideal. Any ideal, however noble and lofty, is still my concept of it. I may call it God, but it is still my thought about that idealistic concept. My God is only what I think. And what I think,

I have created, even if such a creation was a categorical necessity (Kant), like a peg to hang my coat on.

Thus, step by step, I can retrace my projections to my desire to become what I am not. It is a bitter pill to find out in the end that this search for self, for continuity, for security, for well-being, for satisfaction, was just a search for filling in the gaps of an ideal “self”. Such is the bitter pill offered by the Buddha. Following his teachings, his unrelenting logic, his penetrating insight, there is a natural development of confidence (*saddha*). Confidence that truth is greater than bliss, and that there can be no truth as long as there is a search for bliss, can make one turn to the Buddha with the conviction that his teaching may show that here is a way to end all conflict. And thus, confidence may lead to understanding and truth, just as a search for bliss led to conflict.

It is knowledge (not necessarily insight) of the fact of sorrow in its many forms of physical and mental pain that makes one search for a remedy, for an ideal solution. Such a search will always be for an authority, an expert, a specialist. In physical pain one will consult a doctor, in financial difficulty or dispute a lawyer will be consulted; in spiritual trouble there will be a choice of as many solutions as there are trouble-makers. But a choice has to be made, and for that one has to rely on the authority of faith, of hear-say, repute, recommendations, etc. Here the common factor is confidence; one believes either in what one has heard, or in one's own judgement of results obtained so far. But it is always a trusting confidence which will make one adhere to the same physician and his medicine.

Thus it is sorrow in one form or another which may bring about confidence (*dukkh'upanisā saddha*).

Hardly known, and still less quoted, there is a chain of conditionality, which seems as a continuation of this chain of conflict, a chain which starts with conflict (*dukkha*), yet leads to the deliverance thereof. That too is a chain of twelve links and it appears in

the Suttas only once³, although how to get out of trouble seems to be so much more important than the knowledge of how we got into trouble.

Before going into a more detailed study of the interdependence of these twelve links, here are their names: confidence (*saddha*), joy (*pamojja*), delight (*piti*), tranquillity (*passaddhi*), well-being (*sukha*), concentration (*samādhi*), insight (*ñāña-dassana*), disgust (*nibbida*), dispassion (*virāga*), deliverance (*vimutti*), knowledge of extinction (*khaye ñāña*), destruction of all defilements (*āsavakkhaya*). Just as there are eleven stages building up from ignorance (*avijja*) to the turbulence of conflict (*dukkha*) under the cloud of delusion (*moha*), so there are eleven stages to undo that work in the light of understanding (*paññā*) to reach the final rest of insight (*vipassanā-ñāña*)

As we have seen the actualisation of the will-to-live, being rebirth leading to the arising of conflict, so confidence (*saddha*), leading away from conflict, indicates the birth of understanding. This first step in the right direction gives at the same time an experience of release, even though it is not final, in the first taste of happiness (*pamojja*). Although happiness is not a goal for striving (for that would be a set-back to craving and the will-to-become), yet it makes the task of undoing lighter, and may be experienced as a pleasant by-product, especially in the beginning of this process of deliverance.

It is this joyful experience which is so necessary to provide the courage even for a moment to stop and look. It is not a joy of expectation of an escape, but a joy which must grow out into a delight (*piti*), which elsewhere⁴ has been described as one of the five stages of mental absorption (*jhāna*), where all reasoning (*vitakka-vicāra*) has ceased to be an obstacle. It is the theme of disburdening which seems to be the key-note in this harmonious symphony of thought, first as joy and delight in a foretaste of freedom, soon

³S. II. xii. 23

⁴“Agony and Ecstasy” by the present author.

to be followed by disgust and dispassion, to find its apotheosis in deliverance.

The progress from joy to delight, and from there to tranquillity (*passaddhi*) indicates the path of peace in meditation (*samatha-bhāvana*), where ecstatic delight has to be abandoned for the deeper experience of inner well-being (*sukha*), which leads to concentration (*saṃādhi*) of one-pointedness and equanimity. But that is as far as mental absorption can lead. Peace is not the end of war, for there still remains the possibility of new conflict.

And so, the path of tranquil concentration, too, has to be abandoned, lest there be stagnation which can only block all further progress. Thus, from here on, concentration (*saṃādhi*) must give way to contemplation (*vipassanā*). It is interesting to note that in the sixth link in the chain of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppāda*) we found sensation (*vedanā*) standing at the cross-road, forking out, either to craving, rebirth and conflict, or without craving, leading to no-more-becoming. Likewise in this chain of conditioned release, the six links from confidence to concentration bring one again to a cross-road, forking out to the peace, of mental satisfaction, or without the satisfaction of peaceful concentration to the contemplation of what is (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*).

“Seeings things as they are” is not a literal translation of the frequently used phrase *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*, which means to see and understand the such-ness of things. Now, to see the suchness or the true nature of an event, e.g. death, is not merely the sight of a corpse, even if that were a completely detached view without any grief or attachment. For, death is not an isolated event; it is a part of the process of dependent origination and cessation. Thus, the Buddha said, a person does not die because of his karma (although that may affect the manner and time and other circumstances): one dies because one is born. There is dissolution, because there was composition (*jāti-paccayā jarā-maraṇam*). Therefore, seeing the true nature or the suchness of death involves the seeing and

understanding of birth. It is not so much the “how”, but the “why” birth takes place, which may provide the true understanding, the seeing of things as they are. In seeing and understanding that birth is death, that growth is decay, that evolution is involution, there remains ultimately but one thing to understand, namely the process of change as the impermanent and non-substantial nature of everything that changes.

That in itself is not difficult to see, but the consequences of such understanding are so far reaching and so revolutionary that one prefers not to see, so that there would be no understanding. For, as long as there is no understanding, there is neither an experiencing of the need for action. Then, when the need for change is not experienced, the mind can go to sleep in the self-satisfaction of concentration, of a continuation in peaceful delusion. And that is just what happens when birth leads to death, and death leads to rebirth. The problem is seen with the intellect but not understood with insight; and thus there is conflict and an attempt at escaping from conflict, but no solution, because the “I” does not want to be solved: to be dissolved.

That is the meaning of Samsāra, the continuous round of existence, where ignorance brings forth the complex which is conflict, which is not understood and hence leads back to ignorance. It is not even a spiral staircase, providing perhaps a better view on the next round; it is just a merry-go-round, where one gets giddy and has to pay for that too!

As it might have been expected, where wrong grasping led to delusion and craving, there right comprehension, i.e. the understanding of the real nature of sense-experiences (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*) will give rise to weariness, repulsion, disgust (*nibbida*) with such a delusive world. This weariness, however, does not make a man a misanthrope, for he does not avoid human nature; but the wiliness of human society becomes repulsive on account of its artificiality, conventionality and hypocrisy. His detachment is not neces-

sarily a life of renunciation in a monastic order; it is never a morbid asceticism which aims at mortification of the flesh or at subjection of the mind. It is as a detachment from any view which implies opposites as world and self, matter and mind, virtue and sin.

Thus, this weariness with all these particularities leads to dispassion (*virāga*), which is a process of loosening the fetters of delusion. And so this process of passionlessness restores to harmony the restlessly unfolding mind. Dispassion is not the absence of emotions, but a co-ordination of feeling and thinking. Pure rationality leads to pride and lack of love; pure emotion becomes sentimentality which is also subjective and which loves only for the sake of possession. Dispassionate thought-feeling leads to unbound action (*kriyā*), action which is pure because it arises spontaneously from the presently understood need. Such action is complete because it does not project itself into the future with a purpose. Such action, which is neither bound by craving, nor incomplete through striving, is truly free action, an act of deliverance. And so, dispassion (*virāga*) leads to freedom (*vimutti*).

The knowledge of that freedom is the knowledge of extinction (*khaye nāṇa*) of all conflict and delusion. In this realisation of extinction of conflict in all its aspects there is the realisation of attainment of the highest stage on the path of sainthood (*arahatta-magga*), immediately followed by the fruit of arahantship (*phala*), when all defilements are totally extinguished (*āsavakkhaya*), which is the final overcoming of ignorance, when no more craving can arise, and when no will can lead on further.

In this manner, then, can be brought about the dependent cessation of a dependent origination. The process is often long and tedious. Many times failure will cause discouragement, and yet victory is so close at hand. The supreme act of realisation which sets free both mind and heart which have been enslaved for thousands of lives, is that of a single moment. The delay in realisation is mostly due to an anxiety to achieve which makes one search and escape

from what is evident. But achievement there is none in the realisation of *anatta*. The freedom of deliverance is always there, but desire caused by delusion has confused the issue and made a problem when there was no conflict.

When it is seen that conflict has arisen in dependence on delusion, the very understanding thereof will comprehend the impossibility of any problem or conflict arising when there is no opposition, no “self”. Delusion cannot be overcome. But it will cease, when it is seen as such. And that is enlightenment.

Looking Back

In looking back through the history of man's wrestling with thought, thinking, with mind and intelligence to arrive at truth, we have had the need of looking at the same problems which all have had to face, But we have the advantage that even if there was a search, the object had ceased to be the infinite, the answer to which could only be expected in the mind of God. Thus, the perspective with its "vanishing point" far on the horizon, and its starting point with the viewer on the spot, has completely changed not only the outlook, but particularly the approach to the problem.

Einstein wrote of Newton: "Nature to him was an open book, whose letters he could read without effort". We too have that same book open before us; and we could read as easily if only we would, or even easier, as we have the added advantage of the greatest teacher of all times telling us how to see and what. Up to now, we have been as boys playing with pebbles on the sea-shore, discarding one for a prettier looking shell; but we never saw the ocean nor the little boy on the shore. And yet, it is in their relation that the truth can be seen.

There is no truth in conflict, and yet it is conflict which conditions and distorts our whole life. Obviously, we have to learn seeing things all over again, not in the perspective of a drawing, but in their relationship to a non-existing "ego", however paradoxical that may sound. A paradox, after all, is a well established fact, a truth,

however absurd it may appear. The absurdity is the conflict which refuses to see the truth as it is, but prefers to distort it, in order to suit the convenience of the viewer who must be right at any price. Although time is a mental concept, invented to measure the duration of a thing which is nothing but change, still it is not too late to see even now: that our knowledge is ignorance (*avijja*) in which all experience is conditioned (*sankhāra*), in which matter is mind, in which action is reaction, and being is becoming; in which there is only conflict because “I” am that conflict; and in the understanding of which there is neither ignorance, nor conflict, neither birth nor death in the cessation of “self”.

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and the first year of his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on 15 September, 1988.